

## National Pet Owner Survey Finds People Prefer Pet Companionship Over Human

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You're stranded on a deserted island. Which would you rather have (human or animal companionship)? Maybe Cindy Crawford? Perhaps Brad Pitt? Or your dog, Spot? The survey says: Spot.

According to a recent national survey, given the choice of human or animal companionship, more than half of the pet owners surveyed want a family pet instead of another person with them if deserted on an island.

A survey of 1,019 pet owners, conducted by the American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA), reveals that pets play a stronger role in Americans' lives for companionship and affection than many realize.

In an effort to learn more about relationships between humans and their pets, AAHA asked pet owners about day-to-day interaction with their pets in the fifth annual national pet owner survey.

The results provide insight on how people are humanizing their relationships with their pets. Of the survey respondents:

57 percent of pet owners surveyed would want a pet as their only companion if deserted on an island.

80 percent of survey respondents selected companionship as the major reason for having a pet.

72 percent of pet owners say that affection is their pets' most endearing trait.

79 percent of surveyed pet owners give their pets holiday or birthday presents.

33 percent of pet owners talk to their pets on the phone or through the answering machine.

21 percent of dog owners sometimes dress their pets.

62 percent of respondents often sign letters or cards from them and their pets.

55 percent of pet owners consider themselves as mom or dad to their pets.

"When people find strong companionship and affection in their pets, it is not unusual for them to begin treating their animals as important family members," said Dr. Merry Crimi, AAHA president-elect. "Pets become as endearing as a child or a close friend to many pet owners."

The survey was conducted by AAHA through its membership from across the country. Respondents were pet owners who take their pets to AAHA veterinarians. Pet owners from 39 states, provinces in Canada and the District of Columbia responded.

The American Animal Hospital Association is an international organization of more than 12,000 veterinarians who treat companion animals. AAHA reminds pet owners that they can help pets live healthier and longer by taking their pets to the veterinarian for periodic physical exams,

vaccinations, and dental care, as well as providing pets with fresh water, a balanced diet and exercise. Established in 1933, the association is well known among veterinarians for its high standards for hospitals and pet health care.

### 1995 Pet Owner Survey Summary of Results

**1. What type of pet(s) do you own? (Please circle all that apply) (Multiple responses accepted) (n=1,019)**

Dog 79%  
 Cat 55  
 Bird 13  
 Reptile 5  
 Pocket pet (gerbil, hamster, guinea pig, etc.) 5  
 Other (Please specify) (fish, horses, etc.) 12

**2. How many of each pet do you own? (Please circle only one number for each type of pet you own)**

	1	2	3	4	5 or more
Dog (n=803)	54%	28	10	3	4
Cat (n=558)		41%	27	15	6
Bird (n=128)	55%	24	7	2	12
Reptile (n=48)		69%	15	4	4
Pocket pet (n=56)	61%	21	--	4	14
Other (n=126)		29%	13	13	2

**3. Please answer the remaining survey questions with only one of your pets in mind. Please indicate below which pet you will use to answer the remaining questions. (n=1,019)**

Dog 71%  
 Cat 25  
 Bird 1  
 Reptile <1  
 Pocket pet (gerbil, hamster, guinea pig, etc.) <1  
 Other 1

### GENERAL PET INFORMATION

**4. How old is your pet? (n=1,019)**

0-1 year	19%
2-5 years	39
6-10 years	26
More than 10 years	16

**5. How old was your pet when you acquired it? (n=1,019)**

Less than 3 months	63%
4 months to 1 year	23
1-2 years	8
3-5 years	4
6 or more years	1

**6. What was the major reason for acquiring your pet? (Multiple responses accepted) (n=1,017)**

Security/protection	5%
Companionship	80
Child's playmate	10
Profit/breeding	1
Other	13

**7. How much did you pay for your pet (excluding the cost of vaccinations, neutering, etc.)? (n=1,018)**

Nothing	39%
Less than \$50	12
\$51 - \$100	9
\$101 - \$200	12
\$201 - \$500	20
More than \$500	8

**8. Do you prefer to own a pure-bred animal or a mixed breed? (n=1,019)**

Pure-bred	30%
Mixed	20
No preference	50

**9. Is pet hair shedding a concern for you when selecting a breed of dog or cat? (n=1,001)**

Yes	42%
No	58

**PET AFFECTION**

**10. What is your pet's most endearing trait? (Multiple responses accepted)**

**(n=1,015)**

Appearance	21%
Affection	72
Unusual habits	14
Sound (bark, meow, song, etc.)	3
Other	6

**11. Do you ever specially prepare your pet's food (e.g., heat it, mix**

**different foods, prepare special meals, etc.)? (n=1,013)**

Yes	48%
No	52

**12. Do you ever celebrate your pet's birthday? (n=1,007)**

Yes	50%
No	50

**13a. Do you ever give your pet holiday or birthday presents? (n=1,014)**

Yes	79%
No	21

**13b. If yes (in question 13a), what do you buy your pet for holidays/its birthday? (Please circle all that apply) (Multiple responses accepted) (n=801)**

Play toy	72%
Chew toy	56
Snacks	60
Clothing	11
Other	8

**14. If you were deserted on an island and could have only one companion,**

**which would you pick? (Multiple responses accepted) (n=990)**

Dog	42%
Cat	11
Bird	1
Human	46
None	1
Other	3

**15. Do you ever dress your pet? (n=1,003)**

Yes	17%
No	83

**16. When you are away, do you ever talk to your pet on the phone (or through your answering machine)? (n=999)**

Yes	33%
No	67

**17. Do you ever sign letters or cards from you and your pet? (n=1,002)**

Yes	62%
No	38

**18. If you don't have children or your children are grown, does caring for your pet fulfill a need of parenting for you? (n=889)**

Yes	62%
No	38

**19. Which of the following do you consider yourself to be for your pet?**

**(Multiple responses accepted) (n=994)**

Mom or dad	55%
Master/guardian	22
Playmate/friend	28
Other	3

#### **PET HEALTH**

**20. Is your pet spayed or neutered? (n=997)**

Yes	78%
No	22

**21. Has your pet ever had any chronic health problems (e.g., hip dysplasia, cancer, cataracts, diabetes, etc.)? (n=997)**

Yes	24%
No	73
Don't know	3

**22. What steps do you take to ensure your pet's quality of life? (Please**

**circle all that apply) (Multiple responses accepted) (n=1,001)**

Regular exercise	64%
Premium brands of pet food	79
No human food	36
Regular veterinary checkups/vaccinations and teeth cleaning	87

Recreation (i.e., camping, car trips, etc.) 38  
Other 9

**23. How do you exercise your pet? (Please circle all that apply)  
(Multiple responses accepted) (n=967)**

Jog with pet 10%  
Play catch (ball, frisbee, etc.) 51  
Walk pet 58  
Wrestle 33  
Let pet run unsupervised 32  
Other 18

**24. About how often do you exercise your pet? (n=979)**

More than once a day 38%  
Once a day 30  
Every other day 5  
2-3 times a week 13  
Several times a month 6  
Never 8

**25. Does your pet generally get more exercise than you do?  
(n=988)**

Yes 52%  
No 48

**26. If your pet has ever been lost, how did you locate it?  
(Multiple responses accepted) (n=1,018)**

Shelter 2%  
Neighbor 4  
Searched the neighborhood 12  
Pet returned on its own 9  
Advertised with flyers or in the newspaper 1  
Pet was never lost 74  
Microchip I.D. 1  
Never found it <1  
Other 5

**27. Who most often takes care of your pet when you are away?  
(Multiple responses accepted) (n=984)**

Petsitter 10%  
Kennel 11  
Veterinary facility 15  
Friend/neighbor/relative 66  
Other 6

**28. Does your pet ever travel with you? (n=987)**

Yes 58%  
No 42

**29. What are the most important factors to you when choosing a veterinary hospital? (Please circle all that apply) (Multiple responses accepted) (n=997)**

Veterinarian's reputation	82%
Cleanliness	74
Treatment of animals	85
Modern equipment	43
Staff	70
Payment plans	16
Services offered	42
Geographical location	37
Referred by someone	29
Other	8

**30. Have you ever heard of the American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA)?**

(n=992)

Yes 63%  
No 37

Surveys were received from pet owners in 39 states, the District of Columbia and four Canadian province